MANITOBA READING ASSESSMENT 1985

SUMMARY REPORT

Manitoba Education

88-02579/

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SUMMARY REPORT

A REPORT OF THE
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION BRANCH
MANITOBA EDUCATION

372.4
M36 s Manitoba reading assessment program, 1985.
Summary Report/a report of the
Curriculum Development and Implementation
Branch, Manitoba Education

ISBN 0-7711-0657-2

1. Reading--Manitoba--Ability testing.
2. Educational tests and measurements--Manitoba.
I. Manitoba. Curriculum Development and Implementation Branch.

Winnipeg 1987

PREFACE

This Summary Report is the third of three reports of the findings of the 1985 Reading Assessment. It contains a brief description of the study along with recommendations based not only upon teacher and principal opinions but also upon the judgment of the Technical Advisory Committee. Members of the Committee reviewed the data and interpreted it in the light of their considerable knowledge and experience. Teachers and school administrators are encouraged to review the recommendations for applicability to their own programs.

There are two other series of reports on this assessment. They are the four Preliminary Reports which present the actual data and the Final Report which analyses the data and presents conclusions and recommendations.

The Preliminary Reports were distributed to all schools in the province as well as to school division offices, to teacher and trustee organizations, to libraries, and to the universities. This Summary Report will receive the same distribution as the Preliminary Reports, while the more extensive Final Report will only be distributed to school division offices, teacher and trustee organizations, libraries, and universities. Copies of this Final Report, however, can be obtained from Manitoba Education on request.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This assessment was made possible by assistance from the many people involved in the development of the tests and production of the reports, as well as co-operation from the students who wrote the tests, and the teachers who administered them. Special mention must be made of a number of groups and individuals:

- The contract team who gave professional assistance in every phase of the project.
- The Joint Committee on Evaluation which provided guidance throughout the program.
- The Reading Technical Advisory Committee which advised on test production and analysis of results.
- The teachers and others who participated in the review of the objectives.
- The school administrators, teachers, and students who were involved in the pilot-testing.
- The teachers who participated in the teacher surveys.
- The divisions and schools that released their teachers to assist in the program.
- The staffs of the Bureau de l'éducation française and the Curriculum Development and Implementation Branch who provided necessary support throughout the program.
- The secretaries of Manitoba Education for their excellent work in typing the manuscripts.
- The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for permission to use the radio news item in the listening-speaking component of the grade 6 assessment.
- Kevin Evans of the CBC for narrating the story, "The Talking Cat", used in the listening-speaking assessment.
- Dennis Pankiw, Red River Community College, for assistance in obtaining the commercials for the listening-speaking component of the grade 6 assessment.
- Dr. Bruce Johnson and Linda Neden, Statistical Advisory Service, University of Manitoba, for their assistance in analyzing the data for the Comparison Component of the assessment.

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SUMMARY READING REPORT

The 1985 Reading Assessment is the second assessment conducted in reading in Manitoba. The first assessment took place in May, 1980, and provided an indication of the reading performance of students in Manitoba. The second reading assessment took place in May, 1985, at four grade levels: 3, 6, 9, and 12. Similar to those of its 1980 predecessor, the purposes of the 1985 Reading Assessment were:

1. to provide benchmark indicators about student reading performance in Manitoba,
2. to obtain data on student reading performance which will assist in curriculum and program improvement at various levels,
3. to assist school divisions with student evaluations in reading,
4. to help teachers improve their skills in evaluating student reading, and
5. to assist school divisions and teachers in student evaluation in certain areas of listening, speaking, and oral and silent reading.

Since this was a first attempt at evaluating listening and speaking, oral reading, and certain aspects of silent reading on a wide-scale basis, the assessment of these particular language arts areas was conducted as a separate pilot project at grade 6 only. A sub-sample of those students who formed the provincial sample for the group paper-and-pencil test was used for this part of the study.

READING IN THE MANITOBA ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM

The Manitoba English Language Arts curriculum is based on what is currently known as the whole language model of reading. This model stresses the interrelationship between thought and language and regards reading as a natural extension of human language development. In a whole language approach, teachers build their reading programs on whatever base of language or languages a given learner brings to school. Children are involved first in large units of meaningful language (e.g., a story, an experience chart, a poem) and then later move to the smaller components (sentence, word, sound). Reading is learned in meaningful contexts rather than in isolated segments. The focus is always on meaning. A close link is maintained between oral

language, listening, reading and writing. Similarly, thinking skills such as categorization, classification, ordering and identifying attributes are developed in and through reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Learning to read is a continuous process that undergoes constant refinement. With increased opportunities to read for different purposes, readers develop more efficient and fluent reading. With greater proficiency and practice, they develop an ever-broadening knowledge base, accompanied by ever-increasing automaticity and expanding background.

THE READING ASSESSMENT

Reading is also the most pervasive curricular skill area and, therefore, the most difficult to delimit. No province-wide assessment can examine all of the reading skills which students develop and use. Thus, a wide-scale assessment must aim for a reading test which is broad enough to permit generalizations about overall reading performance, yet must be sufficiently specific to be of value to school divisions and teachers.

The reading skills assessed in the province-wide reading test were categorized as follows:

1. Meaning Vocabulary - recognizing words in context
2. Literal Comprehension - understanding explicitly stated meaning
3. Interpretive Comprehension - inferring meaning not actually stated
4. Critical and Reflective Comprehension - judging the validity of the material and considering implications
5. Study Skills - locating, organizing, and interpreting reading in content areas

Furthermore, to assess these skills realistically at the four grade levels, the reading materials had to be congruent with the range of materials students read at those particular grades. Thus the reading materials ranged from narrative stories to poetry, to expository writing. The questions also reflected typical classroom situations: cloze passages, multiple-choice and open-ended items, the latter requiring students to write in their answers.

While every attempt was made to provide a more meaningful context by using longer passages than those typically used in standardized tests, time constraints prevented the use of many of the longer forms employed in the classroom. Similarly, time constraints limited the number of test items used to assess a particular skill category.

INDIVIDUAL TESTING OF LISTENING, SPEAKING, AND READING

In the classroom, reading is not considered as a separate and independent entity. Rather, listening, speaking and writing are addressed and practised to varying degrees during a typical reading lesson. Since writing had been assessed on a province-wide basis in 1982, a decision was made to examine the areas of listening and speaking along with reading from a more integrated viewpoint in the 1985 assessment.

Since it was felt that this could best be accomplished by individually-administered tests, and since assessing listening and speaking on a province-wide scale required innovation, the following restrictions were required: only a small sample at one grade level (grade 6) was to be tested; the test activities, while varied, were to be kept to a minimum; and the individual reading test, while patterned after a conventional informal reading inventory, was to be modified by reducing the range of levels examined.

The listening-speaking tasks were:

1. listening to and retelling specific directions,
2. listening to and retelling a story,
3. listening critically to radio commercials, and
4. listening to and retelling a news item.

The reading tasks were:

1. reading passages orally,
2. reading passages silently,
3. retelling the content of the passages unaided, and
4. answering specific questions on the passages.

The complete text of the instruments used to test students in the individual component as well as a description of the skills assessed can be found in Appendix B of the Reading Assessment Final Report, copies of which have been sent to all school division offices.

OTHER COMPONENTS

READING INTEREST INVENTORY

In order to collect information related to students' reading habits and interests, a brief student questionnaire was included as part of the group reading test at each of the four grade levels.

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to collect information related to instructional methods, resources and professional development, a sample of English language arts teachers was surveyed.

COMPARISON TESTING

In order to compare student performance in 1985 with student performance in 1980, selected questions from the earlier assessment were re-administered to samples of students from grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 in 1985.

RESULTS

READING

GRADE 3 RESULTS
(n = 1233)

Categories Tested	Maximum Possible Points	Mean Score	Mean Percent
Meaning Vocabulary	5	4.02	80.4
Literal Comprehension	15	11.21	74.7
Interpretation	20	14.35	71.8
Critical-Reflective	2	.83	41.5
Study Skills	2	1.47	73.5

Results indicate that students in grade 3 are reading reasonably well in most areas. They are especially able to understand word meanings, and they comprehend and interpret various types of material at their grade level. The critical-reflective score, while somewhat lower than that for the other categories, could well be a reflection of the fact that both questions were open-ended, a type of question with which students tend to have difficulty. In addition, only a small number of items were used to measure this category.

GRADE 6 RESULTS
(n = 1266)

Categories Tested	Maximum Possible Points	Mean Score	Mean Percent
Meaning Vocabulary	7	3.88	55.5
Literal Comprehension	12	9.03	75.2
Interpretation	13	6.95	53.5
Critical-Reflective	7	3.94	56.3
Study Skills	9	5.22	58.0

At the sixth-grade level the students' reading ability is generally satisfactory. Performance in literal comprehension was strong. Scores, however, were lower in the interpretation, critical-reflective, and study skills categories. The lower scores reflect several factors: a greater number of open-ended questions, a greater degree of difficulty in inferential questions, and a greater degreee of organizational skill needed in the study skills task.

The meaning vocabulary score may be somewhat deceiving due to poor performance on one particularly difficult question (item 11).

GRADE 9 RESULTS
(n = 1163)

Categories Tested	Maximum Possible Points	Mean Score	Mean Percent
Meaning Vocabulary	6	4.70	78.4
Literal Comprehension	13	8.55	65.8
Interpretation	11	7.40	67.3
Critical-Reflective	5	2.55	51.0
Study Skills	5	4.18	83.6

Results indicate that the majority of students in grade 9 are performing reasonably well and at grade level. As in the lower grades, students found

questions in the critical-reflective domain difficult. This suggests that they experience relative difficulty in making inferential judgments. A high score for study skills indicates that students had little difficulty in obtaining information from a table.

ENGLISH 300 RESULTS
(n = 496)

Categories Tested	Maximum Possible Points	Mean Score	Mean Percent
Meaning Vocabulary	6	4.23	70.5
Literal Comprehension	10	7.75	77.5
Interpretation	17	12.17	71.6
Critical-Reflective	6	4.43	73.8

Scores for English 300 are relatively satisfactory, and there appears to be little difference from one category to another.

ENGLISH 301 RESULTS
(n = 270)

Categories Tested	Maximum Possible Points	Mean Score	Mean Percent
Meaning Vocabulary	6	3.63	60.6
Literal Comprehension	10	6.40	64.0
Interpretation	17	9.93	58.4
Critical-Reflective	6	3.52	58.7

Scores for English 301 are lower than those for English 300. This is to be expected as students take only one credit for English 301 as opposed to two credits for English 300, and English 300 is the more demanding of the two.

Students in 300 and 301 English appeared to have some difficulty with the two open-ended questions (items 15 and 38) that tested their critical-reflective skills. This may also be partially due to a motivational problem typically experienced at higher grade levels when a test does not count for marks.

Cloze Procedure

In a cloze procedure, students are required to reconstruct a passage by replacing a number of deleted words. When used as a testing procedure, it is usual practice to leave the first sentence of the passage intact and to follow a pattern of deleting every fifth word from there on. For ease of scoring, and for increased reliability, it is also usual practice to accept only the exact replacement of the word deleted. While exact-word scoring does result in lower scores for all students, it does not significantly change the rank order of the students' scores.

When using exact-word scoring, as was the case in this assessment, a cloze score which falls between 38 and 60 percent indicates that the student can read and learn from the material. A score above 60 percent indicates that the student would find the material easy reading, while a score below 38 percent suggests that the student would find the material difficult reading.

Because of the age of the students, the cloze tests at the grade 3 level followed a pattern of deleting every seventh word. Also, for the second or "B" test, a list of the deleted words was provided.

CLOZE RESULTS

Grade or Subject	Maximum Possible Points	Mean Score	Mean Percent
Grade 3 "A"	15	8.39	55.9
Grade 3 "B"	14	11.28	80.6
Grade 6	49	26.52	54.1
Grade 9	51	22.01	43.2
English 300	50	24.30	48.6
English 301	50	19.79	39.6

Using the criteria scores outlined above, and excluding the grade 3 "B" test, the mean scores at each grade level fall within the instructional range of 38 to 60 percent. This would indicate that a majority of students are

able to read material similar to the passages used with little difficulty. It should be noted that the cloze passage at the grade 9 level had an ironic twist which may have confused some students. The difference between the English 300 mean and that of English 301 is similar to the differences reflected in other parts of the assessment. It should also be noted that while the 301 mean is lower, some 20 percent of the 301 level students had higher scores than 50 percent of the 300 level students.

INDIVIDUAL COMPONENT

This component, which was administered individually to 88 sixth-grade students, was experimental in nature. However, because there is a close match between the results of this smaller sample of students on the group paper-and-pencil test and the provincial sample (see Chapter 4, of the Final Report), it is safe to place a fair degree of confidence in the results of these students.

The results of this test of selected listening, speaking, and oral and silent reading skills show that the sixth-grade students have a good command of these skills. Their speaking performance is generally good, but they appear to listen and speak with more ease when the material is of a narrative type. The majority read at or above their grade placement, and their oral reading is quite fluent.

Listening

Cued-Recall Listening Comprehension
(n = 88)

Categories Tested	Maximum Possible Points	Mean Score	Mean Percent
Meaning Vocabulary	2	1.75	87.5
Literal Comprehension	14	9.59	68.5
Interpretation	5	3.80	76.0
Critical-Reflective	10	7.52	75.2

Listening and speaking were assessed simultaneously on four tasks or activities: retelling 1) game rules, 2) a story, and 3) a news report; and answering questions about two radio commercials.

Listening scores reflect what the students were able to recall unaided and in response to questions. Their listening comprehension seemed to be quite satisfactory.

Speaking

Speaking Ratings
(n = 88)

	C Content	O Organization	L Language	D Delivery
Retelling directions (Game)	76.2	68.2	80.7	*
Retelling story	79.6	79.5	90.9	86.3
Recalling news item	62.5	62.5	78.4	76.1

*Not assessed.

The table gives the percentage of students who were rated adequate to superior on tests of unaided recall. No unaided recall was required for the commercials because of their shortness.

Most students were assessed as adequate or better in respect to their speaking ability. They were stronger on narrative material than other types because they were obviously more familiar with and comfortable with this format. Overall, their content and organization skills tended to be lower than their language and delivery skills.

Individual Reading Inventory (IRI)

Distribution of Ratings on IRI
(n = 77)

Instructional Level	Number of Students	Proportion of Students
3	5	5.7%
4	4	4.5%
5	12	15.9%
6	12	15.9%
7	14	15.9%
8	22	29.5%
9	8	12.5%

The results in the table indicate that about ten percent of the students may be experiencing serious difficulty with reading at their grade level and that a further 16 percent may be experiencing some difficulties with grade-level material. The great majority seem to be doing reasonably well. Relatively few students demonstrated decoding or word-attack problems. It can be assumed with reasonable confidence that these proportions hold for the provincial sample as well.

COMPARISON TESTING

Comparison Results

Grade	Cloze Passage		Remainder of Test	
	1985	1980	1985	1980
3	16.08	13.76	32.82	28.19
6	14.15	15.62	31.28	33.48
9	12.20	10.42	32.53	28.91
12 (English 300)	21.80	24.76	22.59	23.90
12 (English 301)	13.31	20.90	14.83	19.94

All differences in mean scores reported above proved statistically significant with the exception of that for the cloze passage at grade 12 (English 300). In connection with the sampling, it must be noted that, at the grade 12 level, it is difficult to estimate the effect that semestering has on results.

Overall, the results indicate little change between 1980 and 1985. Nonetheless, results in grade 12 are sufficiently lower to warrant close monitoring. It should be noted that different sampling designs were employed in each year and that it is difficult to estimate the effect this might have on computed averages.

READING INTEREST INVENTORY

Students' responses to the reading interest inventory indicate that many students are well on their way to developing lifelong reading habits: they read for study, for information, and for recreation. Three-quarters or more of the students indicated that they enjoy reading. As the students move up the grades, an increasing amount of reading occurs at home. Also, as students move up the grades, reading interests change: for example, grade 3 students are interested in stories, comics and animal stories; grade 6 students in humour and mystery; grade 9 students in comics, newspapers, adventure, mystery, and horror novels as well as humour, music, sports, fashion and movie magazines; and grade 12 students are interested in newspapers, comics, humourous magazines, adventure novels, fashion and sports magazines, and short stories.

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Teachers indicated that the factors that help most with improving their programs are:

1. adequate time for planning,
2. conferring with other language arts teachers, and
3. availability of materials.

The sources teachers turn to for defining instructional objectives are, first, Manitoba curriculum guides, then, student needs. Teachers tend to use an eclectic, integrated language arts approach. While whole-class instruction is the most common grouping or organizational approach, flexible instructional groups are the second most common grouping pattern. A variety of resources is used to enhance instruction, in particular audiovisual material, records, and games. The general trend in evaluating student performance and monitoring student progress is to use teacher observations, unit tests, and teacher-made examinations. Nearly 80 percent of teachers surveyed felt their school's library was at least adequate. School and division in-services are valued most for continuing professional development, followed by Special Area Group conferences and university courses. Teachers ranked contact with other teachers, in-school preparation time, and the availability of materials as the most useful means of improving their programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TEACHERS

It is recommended that:

1. much more emphasis be placed on pre-reading activities which draw to mind prior knowledge, on encouraging more active reading, on utilizing written and oral open-ended questions, and on posing questions which stimulate higher level thinking.

2. more emphasis be placed on instruction utilizing informational material in both receptive and presentational modes. Specifically, students should be taught organizational patterns, as well as note-taking, outlining, and summarizing techniques.

3. students be taught to develop a more questioning attitude toward what they read (critical-reflective aspect). They should be given assistance in determining an author's purpose and in supporting their conclusions.

4. more opportunities be made available for students to develop their vocabularies. Time should be set aside for discussing the relationships and meanings of words, library browsing, recreational reading, and sharing responses about what they read.

SCHOOL DIVISIONS

It is recommended that:

1. a concerted effort be made to assist teachers in implementing the English language arts curriculum.

2. greater communication take place among the various subject-area teachers so that reading instruction focuses on helping students acquire the skills of extracting meaning from informational texts.

3. every effort be made to insure that students have easy access to well-stocked, professionally-staffed libraries because libraries play an important role in the development of reading skills.

4. students, especially in the upper grades, be informed of the importance of provincial assessments and be motivated to put forth their best effort in writing these tests.

MANITOBA EDUCATION

It is recommended that:

1. provincial assessments be continued but that a longer time-line for preparation and piloting of tests be provided.

2. given time constraints, tests focus on a narrower range of domains (e.g., critical reflective, etc.) in a more concentrated way, with testing occurring at more frequent intervals.

3. experimental testing, such as the individual listening-speaking and silent and oral reading component, be continued.

4. further means of enhancing professional support to teachers be explored.

FACULTIES OF EDUCATION

It is recommended that:

1. all graduates understand the relationship between language and learning in general and of the importance of reading to their content area in particular.

2. greater collaboration take place between university faculties of education.

3. faculty members become more involved in professional development and classroom research.

REFERENCES

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